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A PECULIAR BEAR FROM ALASKA

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Assistant Curator of Mammalogy and Ornithology.

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Chicago, U. S. A.

November, 1909.

Peculiar Specimen of *Ursus emmonsi*.

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In view of the scanty knowledge of the small Alaska bear known as the glacier bear, it seems important to publish a figure and a description of a peculiar specimen (No. 13768) now on exhibition in Field Museum. This skin (there is no skull) was purchased from the fur dealers C. F. Periolat and Son by Mr. V. Shaw Kennedy and by him presented to the Museum. Later it was mounted by Julius Friesser, one of the Museum's taxidermists, and placed on exhibition. The skin is practically complete although some slight restoration of parts was necessary about the nose and one of the feet. It was received by the fur dealers with a consignment from Alaska, and according to report was obtained in the region of Mount St. Elias.

Its principal peculiarity is in the fact that it is very much darker than the majority of specimens heretofore regarded as representing typical *Ursus emmonsi*. Gray hairs are scattered throughout the pelage of the entire animal, but the predominating effect is black. The black is intense and nearly unmixed with gray on the lower cheeks and throat and thence down the middle of the breast. The nape and sides of the neck also are nearly pure glossy black. The outer sides of the forelegs and the front of the hind legs and the feet are chiefly black. On the feet, forelegs, and breast the hairs are mostly black to the roots but elsewhere in the areas which appear black on the surface, the hairs are grayish at the base. The parts of rather more gray than black are the lower shoulders, the sides, and the hips, but practically all the hairs are broadly tipped with black, the total amount being much greater than in ordinary *Ursus emmonsi*. A black line from the nape to the tail is fairly distinct and the tail itself is mostly pure black. The top of the rostrum is rich ferruginous slightly mixed with creamy, while sparsely scattered ferruginous or creamy hairs extend backward to the occipital region and nearly to the base of the ears, becoming fewer and largely replaced by white hairs posteriorly. The extreme tip of the nose and parts of the lips were missing when the skin was received and are shown restored in the mounted specimen.

It is evident, therefore, that this peculiar bear is practically intermediate in color between the glacier bear (*emmonsi*) and the pure black bear (*americanus*). By some, no doubt, it would be regarded as a hybrid and this it may very well be, but with the present limited knowledge of *Ursus emmonsi* as a species, any conclusion in regard to it is somewhat hypothetical. In casting about for an explanation of the peculiarity of this specimen, other than that of hybridity, one finds some probability in the idea that *Ursus emmonsi* may not be a species nor even a subspecies but only a color phase of *Ursus americanus*. It should be emphasized perhaps that such an idea is distinctly hypothetical and of value only as a possible alternative to be kept in mind in judging such facts as may be disclosed from time to time in the future.

Many circumstances in addition to our specimen lend probability to the view that the glacier bear may be a color phase. Since its discovery some fifteen years ago, scattering skins more or less similar to those seen by the original describer have found their way to various American museums and private collectors. The total number is very small, perhaps not exceeding fifteen,* in spite of the recent activity of travelers and collectors on the coast of Alaska. Of this small number, the majority are imperfect and nearly all are unaccompanied by skulls or with imperfect ones only. The number of authentic observations regarding the habits and distribution of this interesting bear is still smaller and our entire knowledge of it, therefore, is exceedingly incomplete. All the specimens thus far received are from a small part of the coast of Alaska, extending approximately from Lynn Canal to Cape St. Elias. The fact that this is a region of great glaciers caused the animal to be called the glacier bear and from this the idea soon prevailed that it lived exclusively in and about the glaciers and had otherwise remarkable habits. The same region is inhabited also by black and brown bears, both of which, especially the former, are frequently found on or near the glaciers. In fact, from such evidence as can be obtained from the inhabitants of the region, both white and Indian, there is not the slightest foundation for the belief that the habits of the so-called glacier bear differ in any way from those of the ordinary black bear of the coast of Alaska.

So far as can be judged by material now available, there is no proof that the glacier bear differs from the black in cranial characters, such fragmentary skulls as have been received being identical in every

* My own observation includes only eight, all in public museums, but several are known to be in private hands and doubtless a few others have been preserved.

respect with those of black bears from the same region. That it has been thought to be smaller than the black bear is explainable by the probability that a majority of the skins thus far received are those of females or young. Therefore, the only peculiarity of *Ursus emmonsi* is its gray color, which it now appears is subject to marked variation. As a specific character, this peculiarity might sooner have been questioned if the animal were not a large game animal of much popular interest and one of which it is impossible to obtain large series of specimens from single localities. Probably five hundred black bears are killed on the coast of Alaska to one of the gray color representing *Ursus emmonsi.*

If occasional specimens showing divergence in color are found among large series of a given species of small mammal, it is not unusual to regard them merely as examples of dichromatism. Especially is this the case if the species be one in which dichromatism is already known to occur. It is very significant in this connection that the cinnamon phase so well known in other parts of the black bear's range is unknown on the coast of Alaska. That a gray phase may represent it there certainly is not impossible. Another interesting factor in the case is the white bear of the coast of British Columbia, called *Ursus kermodei*, which some regard as an albinotic phase of *Ursus americanus*. Evidently there is an unusual instability in the color of the small bears of the American northwest coast. Doubtless extremely interesting results would be obtained if some of our zoölogical parks should be so fortunate as to obtain living examples of these bears and to successfully breed them in captivity.

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